Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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Latin American Trends

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123
March 19, 1974
No. 0501/75

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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§ 5B (1), (2), and (3)
Automatically declassified
on: Date Impossible to Determine

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LATIN AMERICAN TRENDS

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Western Hemisphere Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

CONTENTS

March 19, 1975

NR

Argentina: Catholic Church Raps Lopez Rega 3

Argentina: New Movement On The Left 5

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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Argentina: Catholic Church Raps Lopez Rega

As if he did not have enough enemies already, presidential adviser and confidant Lopez Rega has now incurred the wrath of the Roman Catholic Church in Argentina. According to the papal nuncio, the church hierarchy was highly offended by Lopez Rega's recent invitation to an off-beat religious sect to officiate at a mass dedicating the new "Altar of the Fatherland"--a monument where Juan and Evita Peron are to be laid to rest.

Lopez Rega, who is believed to be a practicing spiritualist, arranged the ceremony presided over by the American Orthodox Apostolic Catholic Church, a small group founded by defrocked Catholic priests who purportedly practice a mixture of spiritualism and voodoo. This bizarre religious order is headquartered in Brazil where Lopez Rega frequently travels--apparently for pseudo-religious purposes. Lopez Rega's mysticism is a topic of considerable public speculation and indignation has been expressed in military, labor, business, and opposition party circles.

Lopez Rega's troubles with the church have been compounded by a quarrel between the federal administrator of Cordoba Province, Raul Lacabanne, and the Roman Catholic leadership. Lacabanne, who is under fire for his high-handed actions and abuse of civil rights in Cordoba, is a political ally of Lopez Rega.

In a second display of poor judgment last week, Lopez Rega opened himself to attack from critics on yet another front. Accompanied by an entourage of social welfare ministry minions and the presidential press secretary, he made a brief trip to Misiones Province, where he turned over seventeen ambulances to a local hospital and gave several hundred thousand dollars worth of subsidies and equipment to local

March 19, 1975

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

organizations. Provincial elections are scheduled early next month, and his trip has been widely interpreted as government interference to ensure a good showing for the Peronists. Lopez Rega's blatant partisan gesture has already brought private mutterings of disgust from some Peronist politicians, and it is sure to elicit condemnation from all opposition parties.

The social welfare minister's inveterate dabbling in spiritualist hokum and his unabashed efforts to ingratiate himself with the voting public will have a detrimental impact on Mrs. Peron's political position and further weaken support from key social and political sectors. In short, he continues to be a major liability to the President. (CONFIDENTIAL)

March 19, 1975

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

3.5(c)

Argentina: New Movement On The Left

The split in Peronist ranks was boldly underscored last week when an assemblage of dissident left-wing Peronists, including some prominent former government officials, met in Buenos Aires to launch the Authentic Peronist Party. To the surprise of almost no one, the government responded by sending police to disband the meeting, claiming that its sponsors had not obtained the proper permit and that it violated the state of siege.

Organizational efforts have been under way for some time now to put together a coalition of leftist opponents to President Isabel Peron's rightist-oriented Peronist government. Last week's abortive rally was timed to coincide with the second anniversary of the victory of Peron's Justicialist Liberation Front (FREJULI) in the elections on March 11, 1973. By holding the affair at the Nino Restaurant, where Peron conducted negotiations with other political parties to form FREJULI, the left-wing organizers clearly hoped to make the point that they are the legitimate heirs of Peronist doctrine.

Among the key backers the press cited former president Hector Campora, who is said to be maintaining permanent contact with the new party's supporters. Campora has been living in self-imposed exile in Mexico because of his fear of assassination at the hands of right-wing death squads. His recently published book entitled Peron's Mandate is a clear-cut bid to establish himself as the true disciple of Peron. Actually, Campora was held in contempt by Peron and was forced to step down as ambassador to Mexico while Peron was on his deathbed.

In addition to leftist Peronist luminaries such as the deposed governors of several provinces, the Authentic party evidently commands strong allegiance

March 19, 1975

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

from radical Peronist youth and the Montonero guerrilla movement. In its declaration of principles, the party pledged itself to a "revolutionary definition of Peronism" and denounced the "commitments contracted with imperialism behind the people's back." Strong criticism was hurled at Mrs. Peron's administration for violating Peronist ideals and adopting the same principles as the military dictatorships that the Peronists fought to unseat.

The gatnering at the Nino Restaurant marks the first endeavor by the fragmented left to unite against the ruling orthodox Justicialist Party on the national level. The left embarked on this path several months ago in Misiones Province, where it hopes to run candidates in the first electoral contest to be held since the Peronists returned to power. With the elections less than a month away, the government is stalling in granting legal recognition. At first the left tried to gain entry on the ballot as the Descamisado Party (named after Peron's "shirtless ones"), but an electoral court prohibited the party from using Peronist slogans or labels.

The government is apt to continue using all the power at its discretion to prevent the inscription of a rival Peronist party that might challenge it at the polls. While the military will back the government's measures to exclude a leftist political movement from political participation, the potential threat raised by the left will not be lost on officers who already believe that Mrs. Peron's constituency has eroded considerably. (SECRET)

March 19, 1975

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/29 C02693011